DOCTOR STRANGE
12¢
IND.
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FEB
DR. STRANGE
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
HAIL THE MASTER!

PREPARE YE NOW TO ENTER A NEW, AN EVEN GREATER ERA OF MYSTIC MAGNIFICENCE WITH DR. STRANGE, NOT TO MENTION:

STAN LEE, EDITOR | ROY THOMAS, WRITER | GENE COLAN, ARTIST

NOR MUST WE FORGET: TOM PALMER, EMBELLISHER, OR HERB COOPER, LETTERER! AND NOW, AS WE WERE SAYING...

THE VAULT AND THE CURSE

YOU ARE HEREBY EXILED, DR. STRANGE, TO A SAVAGE WORLD...

AND A SWIFT, INEVITABLE DEATH!

HOW LONG CAN WE HOPE TO ENDURE... CAST THUS INTO A HOSTILE DIMENSION?
IF ONLY THE SONS OF SATANNISH HAD NOT STRIPPED MY BELOVED OF HIS ENCHANTED CLOAK...HIS MATCHLESS AMULET!
YET, WE'LL FACE TOGETHER WHAT MUST BE FACED...UNTIL THE END!
THE WONDROUS WHIRLPOOL BEGINS TO ABATE IN ITS FURY, FAIR ONE...
...AS WE NEAR OUR PLACE OF UNHOLY EXILE!
WAIT! THAT SHIMMERING WALL...FROM OUT OF NOWHERE!
LOOK OU--
UNNHHH!
SURVIVED THE IMPACT...WITH A LAST-MOMENT, DESPERATELY-CAST SPELL!
BUT, WHAT OF CLEA? WAS SHE ALSO PROTECTED BY IT?
WHAT OF HER WHOM I LOVE?
OHHHH!
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SHE MOVES... SHE LIVES!!
AND SO THE HEART OF DR. STRANGE MAY BEAT ONCE MORE!
ARE YOU UNHURT? DID MY HASTY MYSTIC SHIELD CUSHION THE TERRIBLE SHOCK?
BUT NOW, FOR THE FIRST TIME, I LOOK ABOUT ME!
WHAT FEARFUL NON-PLACE IS THIS...WHAT DREAD LAND OF SHADOWS?
THAT WE SHALL LEARN WHEN WE REACH A HAVEN OF SAFETY!
COME NOW ...LET THOSE FLOATING PROTO-PLASMIC SHAPES SERVE AS OUR PATHWAY THRU THE VOID...!
YES...OR I WOULD NEVER HAVE DRAWN ANOTHER BREATH!
I FEEL SO HELPLESS ...BEREFT OF ALL POWERS OF MY OWN!
IT'S BORNE HER ALOFT, BEFORE I COULD ACT!
BUT, THERE IS STILL TIME TO HURL A POTENT SPELL...!
CLEA...WHAT IN THE NAME OF THE VISHANTI...?
THE FORMS ON WHICH WE TROD ...THEY'RE ALIVE!
ONE OF THEM HAS ENGULFED ME...IN THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE...!

HOWEVER, BEFORE ANOTHER INCANTATION MAY BE MURMURED...A SINGLE WORD BE VOICED...
A SECOND SHAPE ENVELOPS ME!
IF ONLY I HAVE GUESSED RIGHTLY ABOUT THIS DIMENSION OF ENCOMPASSING DARKNESS...!
I'M FREE!
BEFORE I CAN TEST MY POWERS TO RESCUE FAIR CLEA...
I MUST FIRST SEE IF EVEN I CAN ESCAPE ITS CLUTCHING, HUNGRY GRASP!
BY THE SHADES OF THE SERAPHIM WHICH RULE THE BLACK OF NIGHT-- BY THE FLAMES OF THE FALTINE -- LET ALL BE BATHED IN...LIGHT!
YET, I WAS RELEASED HIGH ABOVE ANY SOLID SURFACE WITHOUT MY CLOAK OF LEVITATION...!
IT WAS THUS THAT EVIL ASMODEUS WISHED ME TO PERISH...HE WHO COMMANDS THE SONS OF SATANNISH!
BUT, HE RECKONED WITHOUT...THE AWESOME EYE OF AGAMOTTO!
THEN LEAD ME TO CLEA... BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE!
FLY, MOST MAGICAL ORB... CREATE A PATH OF FIRE WHICH DOES NOT BURN BENEATH MY FEET!

AND, EVEN AS A HOST OF TRUE BELIEVERS ARE WONDERING FROM WHENCE CAME THE BRIGHT-BLAZING EYE OF AGAMOTTO...
WELL DONE, FAITHFUL SERVANT!
YOU HAVE BROUGHT ME AS CLOSE AS YOU DARE TO THE SHAPE WHICH HOLDS CLEA!
AND NOW, SINCE THE MYSTIC CANNOT GO TO THE MAIDEN...!
GLOBES OF SEARING LIGHT...
DISSOLVING MY NUMBING, JET-BLACK PRISON!
STEPHEN... MY HEART TOLD ME ONLY YOU COULD HAVE FREED ME THUS!
BUT, THERE BESIDE YOU... AGAMOTTO'S ENCHANTED EYE!
I THOUGHT--
--THAT IT, INSIDE ITS AMULET, WAS IN THE HANDS OF ASMODEUS?
SO DOES HE, FAIR ONE... JUST AS I WISHED HIM TO DO!
AND INDEED, JUST THEN, A UNIVERSE AWAY...
THE FABLED BOOK OF THE VISHANTI!
SOURCE OF ALL OCCULT KNOWLEDGE ...ALL AGELESS, ARCANE SPELLS!
YET, EVEN GREATER SURPRISES LIE IN STORE FOR HIM WHO BANISHED US HERE!
IT WAS FOR THIS THAT ALL MY DEEDS WERE DONE... MY DEADLY SNARES SET!
AND SHALL IT NOT PROVE WORTH ALL EFFORTS, WHEN THE SECRETS OF THE FAR-FLUNG DIMENSIONS ARE MINE-- MINE!!
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YOURS, O ASMODEUS?
DO YOU NOT MEAN, RATHER-- OURS?
OF COURSE, MARDUK...
BUT NOW, TO SEARCH THESE PAGES FOR THE INCANTATION I SEEK...
THE ONE WHICH SHALL MAKE THE SONS OF SATANNISH--
THE MASTERS OF A HELPLESS WORLD!!
WAIT! IT CAN'T BE--!
BEFORE MY VERY EYES-- THE TIMELESS TEXT IS-- VANISHING!
IT'S... GONE..!
AS ARE THE CAPTURED CLOAK AND AMULET!
HEAR ME, O YE POWERS OF DARKNESS...
SHOW ME WHITHER HAS GONE THE BOOK OF THE VISHANTI...
THIS CAN ONLY BE SOME LAST ACCURSED TRICK OF STRANGE'S!
BUT, I WILL NOT BE FOILED... I WILL NOT!
THAT BOOK ON WHICH SUPREME ASMODEUS HAS LAID HIS THRICE-CURST HANDS--!
IN THE SATAN-SPHERE, MASTER ...AN IMAGE FORMS...
AN IMAGE OF ONE OLD BEYOND YEARS...WISE BEYOND TEARS...!

THIS IS BETTER THAN I DARED HOPE!
IT'S THE ANCIENT ONE...DR. STRANGE'S ALMOST LEGENDARY MENTOR!
OUR FALLEN FOE MUST HAVE CAST A PREVIOUS SPELL UPON THE BOOK...TO VANISH AFTER A CERTAIN TIME...
...AND REAPPEAR IN HIS GURU'S HIDDEN RETREAT!
HOWEVER, HE RECKONED WITHOUT THE SHEER WILL OF ASMODEUS!
WE SHALL SEEK OUT THE BOOK... WHEREVER IT MAY BE!
BUT, MASTER... IS IT WORTH THE AWESOME RISK?
SILENCE, YOU CRAVEN, CRINGING COWARD!
TO BE RULERS OF A COSMOS... TO WIELD POWER WITHOUT EQUAL ...IS WORTH ANY RISK!
AND THAT IS WHAT WE SHALL POSSESS...WHEN WE HAVE LEARNED THE SPELL OF FIRE AND ICE!
EVEN NOW, I CAN FEEL THEM WAITING ...STRAINING AGAINST THE DIMENSIONAL BONDS THAT BIND THEM...
YMIR, THE LAST OF THE LOATHSOME FROST GIANTS--
--AND SURTUR, THE FEARSOME, FLAMING FIRE DEMON!*
SPEAK YE ALL, THEN, THE ONE INCANTATION WHICH WILL REGAIN OUR PILFERED PRIZE!
RECITE-- THE TRANCE OF TRANSFERAL!
*BOTH IMPRISONED BY ALL-WISE ODIN IN THE IMMORTAL SERIES KNOWN AS TALES OF ASGARD! --STAN
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BY THE DARK THAT HIDES THE DAY-- BY THE MISBEGOTTEN WORD-- TO THE ONE WHOM WE OBEY, OUR POWERS BE NOW... TRANSFERRED!
WELL DONE, MY COMRADES!
WATCH HOW ALL MYSTIC FORCE IS DRAINED FROM YOUR BODIES...
AND INTO THAT OF ASMODEUS!
WE DID NOT THINK... IT WOULD BE LIKE THIS!
BUT NOW ...WE ARE ALL SO... WEAK...
CAN'T STAND ...EVEN THINK!
HELP US, O ASMODEUS ...OR WE PERISH!
AY, FRIENDS... ASMODEUS SHALL HELP YOU!
--HELP CONSIGN YOU EARLIER TO OBLIVION UNENDING THAN YOU DID EXPECT!
BUT, FEAR NOT... YOU WOULD HAVE DIED ANON!
--NO... NOOOO!!
WE ARE BETRAYED-- WE ARE BETRAYED...
A FINAL, FRIGHTENED OUTCRY... THEN THE PALLID VEIL OF SILENCE...!

WHAT FOOLS MY MINIONS WERE--TRULY DESERVING OF THEIR FATE!
TO TRUST ASMODEUS...HE TO WHOM THE VERY STARS ARE BUT STEPPING-STONES TO THE INFINITE!
BUT ENOUGH OF WORDS! DIRE DEEDS ALONE SHALL NOW CARRY THE DAY!
I'LL NEED A NEW GUISE IF I'M TO APPROACH THE INFERNAL ANCIENT ONE WITH IMPUNITY!
AND WHAT MORE FITTING THAN THE FOREVER-VANISHED FORM OF... DR. STRANGE?
'TIS DONE... AND EVEN THE OLD MYSTIC'S MAGIC WILL NOT DETECT THE DIFFERENCE!
FOR, I CREATED MY DISGUISE OUT OF THE VERY AIR LAST BREATHED BY MY VANQUISHED FOE!
DRAW YOUR OWN LAST BREATHS WITH REVERENCE, VENERABLE ONE...
THERE BE PRECIOUS FEW REMAINING TO YOU!

...IS IT MERE MINUTES THAT WE HAVE SAT HERE, STEPHEN...OR IS IT HOURS?
SOME SIREN CALL SEEMED TO PULL US HITHER, WITH PROMISE OF BALMING REST!
I WOULD HAVE GLADLY SOARED ABOVE IT...
HAD I PREVIOUSLY MADE MY CLOAK INVISIBLE, AS I DID MY WONDROUS AMULET!
BUT, I DARED NOT ...FOR FEAR THAT TWIN SPELLS MIGHT HAVE BEEN DETECTED BY THE SONS OF SATANNISH!
YET, THIS SEEMS A PLEASANT PLACE ENOUGH, AND--
CLEA--WHAT IS IT...?
THAT FOLIAGE --IT MOVES AS THOUGH ALIVE!
IT IS ALIVE... LIKE SOME RAVAGING BEAST OF PREY!
BACK, MY LOVE...GET BACK, BEFORE--
STEPHEN --NO!!
AAAARRHH!
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YOU'VE BEEN ENSNARED --AND I'VE NO POWERS LEFT TO HELP YOU!
--THE PLANT ITSELF!
WAIT! YOU'RE CHANGING-- EVOLVING INTO--
ONLY ONE MYSTIC MEANS REMAINS TO ME... WHICH NEEDS NO OCCULT PASSES!
ONCE AGAIN, THE EYE OF AGAMOTTO... MUST ACT FOR ME!
ALREADY MY HANDS BEGIN TO BE ALTERED... PREVENTING ME FROM CASTING SPELLS!
STAND CLEAR, CLEA...OR SUFFER THE SAME FATE!
IF IT FAILS... DR. STRANGE FALLS!
BUT, WHERE HAS IT SPED... ON WHAT MISSION?
HE DOESN'T ANSWER!
NO HOPE NOW REMAINS ...SAVE THE SACRED EYE!
MEANWHILE, TRAVELING AS IT ALONE CAN DO BETWEEN THE COSMIC CORRIDORS THAT DIVIDE THE DIMENSIONS, THE AWESOME ORB OF AGAMOTTO MOVES WITH THE SPEED OF THOUGHT ITSELF...

...UNTIL A CERTAIN UNIVERSE APPEARS UNTO ITS GHASTLY, GLEAMING SIGHT...ONE CERTAIN PLANET...ONE CERTAIN GRAVE-YARD...
AND THERE, IT ACTS... BATHING WITH ITS GLOW AN UNASSUMING PACK-AGE LEFT BEHIND BY DR. STRANGE SOME TIME BE-FORE...A PACKAGE WHICH CONTAINS--
THE TRUE CLOAK OF LEVITATION!!
THEN... BACK, BACK THEY RACE, LIKE THINGS ALIVE... IN A RELENTLESS, UNBELIEVABLE RACE WITH DEATH IT-SELF--!
THE ENCHANTED CLOAK...IT IS HERE!
TO ME, MANTLE AND EYE...BEFORE THE CLOCK MAY RECORD ANOTHER MOMENT!
BUT, HOW CAN IT HELP? I DON'T--
AN INSTANT'S PATIENCE, CLEA...
AND ALL SHALL BE MADE KNOWN TO YOU!
AS THE CLOAK DESCENDS UPON HIS SHOULDERS, A BLINDING AURA SURROUNDS HIM!
DOES THIS MEAN... HE IS SOMEHOW SAVED?

BUT, EVEN AS THE VOICELESS QUERY IS THOUGHT...IT IS ANSWERED...!
NOW, YE DEMONS OF DREAD, 'TIS DR. STRANGE WHOM YOU FACE ONCE MORE... HIS POWERS AT THEIR HEIGHT!
BY THE WISDOM OF OSHTUR-- BY THE CURSE OF WATOOMB-- LET THE FORCES WHICH THREATEN NOW KNOW ONLY DOOM!
YOU ARE FREE ONCE MORE!
BUT HOW, WITH ONLY YOUR CLOAK TO AID YOU?
BUT, HOLD! I FEEL SOME UNFAMILIAR SHIELD BETWEEN THE WORLDS ...PREVENTING MY PASSAGE!
--BECAUSE ASMODEUS HAS STOLEN MY VERY FACE AND FORM!
MY SORCERY-TRAINED SENSES TELL ME I CANNOT RE-ENTER THE EARTH DIMENSION--
WHEN I DID FOLLOW YOU INTO THE LAIR OF ASMODEUS, FAIR ONE, I KNEW THE FIRST ROUND OF VICTORY MIGHT BE THEIRS!
THUS, I PLACED THE ESSENCE OF MUCH OF MY POWER IN MY SCARLET MANTLE! AND SO...
BUT, IF YON SHIELD AFFECTS ME AS I AM...
IT SHALL NOT LONG PREVAIL!
FOR, MANY CAN BE THE FORMS...
...AND MANY THE FACES, OF...

...THE MAN CALLED...
DR. STRANGE!

THEN, AS TWO FIGURES MATERIALIZE IN A NIGHT-SHROUDED CEMETERY...
RETURN TO MY SANCTUM SANCTORUM, CLEA...
AND WAIT THERE FOR MY RETURN!
AS FOR DR. STRANGE--
HE MUST SEEK OUT THE SCHEMING ENTITY KNOWN AS ASMODEUS...
IN THE PLACE WHERE AN EARLIER SPELL SENT THE BOOK OF THE VISHANTI--!
...MY PROFOUND THANKS, REVERED MASTER, FOR ALLOWING IT TO RESIDE HERE FOR THE NONCE!
I DARED NOT CHANCE THAT IT FALL INTO LESS WORTHY HANDS THAN MY OWN!
AHHH... HERE IS THE INCANTATION I SOUGHT...!
THE OLD FOOL SUSPECTS, BUT IS NOT SURE!
A FEW MOMENTS MORE, AND IT WILL MAKE PRECIOUS LITTLE DIFFER--
WHAT--?
PUT DOWN THE SACRED TOME, EVIL ONE!
HOW UNCOMMONLY MY PROTEGE SPEAKS AND ACTS...AS IF IT WERE NOT TRULY HE AT ALL!
AND YET, MY MAGIC DETECTS NO FAKERY...IT IS THE REAL FORM OF STEPHEN STRANGE...!
WHO IN THE NAME OF--?
HAVE YOUR DREAMS OF CONQUEST DEAFENED YOUR EARS TO THE VOICE OF...THE TRUE DR. STRANGE?
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LIAR! 'TIS RATHER YOU WHO ARE THE IMPOSTOR--
AS ANY FOOL'S EYES CAN SURELY TELL HIM!
MUST NOT LET THE ANCIENT ONE JOIN THE FRAY ON THE SIDE OF HIS DISCIPLE!
YOUR MAGIC IS MUCH STRONGER THAN BEFORE, ASMODEUS--
--AND YOU ARE ASMODEUS, AS SURELY AS I STAND HERE!
WHY HAVE YOU COME ALONE, WITHOUT THE SONS OF SATANNISH TO ASSIST YOU?
NO ANSWER ...A RESPONSE THAT TELLS ITS OWN DEADLY TALE!
BUT, YOU SHALL NOT FIND THE REAL DR. STRANGE AS UNSUSPECTING A VICTIM AS NO DOUBT THEY WERE!
AND, NOW THAT I HAVE PARRIED YOUR OWN MYSTIC THRUST...
LET US SEE HOW YOU FARE AGAINST...THE FLAMES OF THE FALTINE!
A BALL OF EMERALD FIRE ...COMING STRAIGHT TOWARDS ME...!

NO TIME TO ERECT A DEFENSE!
I'LL BE KILLED... BURNED TO A CINDER!
NO-- NOOO!
BUT, EVEN AS THE ECHOES OF THE MASQUERADING MYSTIC'S CRY FADE INTO NOTHINGNESS...
I'M ALIVE... WHEN I SHOULD BE DEAD!
AND, I THINK I KNOW WHY!
SO...IN HIS MADDENED RAGE, THE IMPOSTOR REVEALS HIMSELF UNTO ME!
BUT, STILL SHALL I NOT ACT...NOT INTERVENE TO HELP MY BELOVED DISCIPLE!
THAT GIVES ME THE ADVANTAGE IN BATTLE!
YOU ARE SWORN ONLY TO SAVE LIFE... NEVER TO WILL-FULLY TAKE IT!
YOU'RE DOOMED, YOU SOFT-HEARTED FOOL... DOOMED!
AS EASILY AS I NOW DISSOLVE YOUR LAST SPELL...SO SHALL I ANNIHILATE YOU!
IT IS HE WHO NOW MUST PROTECT THE WORLD FROM EVIL MAGIC...OR BE DESTROYED BY IT!
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I HOPE AND PRAY, MY SON, THAT YOU WILL UNDERSTAND MY SEEMING ALOOFNESS...!
I DO, HONORED MENTOR! BUT NOW...
SURRENDER, ASMODEUS... YOU WHO WOULD HAVE TURNED THE BOOK OF THE VISHANTI ITSELF TO YOUR DREAD PURPOSE!
DO NOT FORCE ME TO USE MY FULL MYSTIC MIGHT AGAINST YOU--TO YOUR OWN SORROW!
SURRENDER? YOU MUST BE MAD, STRANGE!
RATHER, I CHOOSE TO STRIKE... THUS!
IT IS AS I FEARED! IN HIS CRAZED LUST FOR POWER, HE HAS LOST ALL REASON!
I MUST DO... WHAT I MUST!
STOP, FOOLHARDY ONE-- BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE!
AHH...YOU UNLEASH YOUR WHOLE POWER UPON ME!
THEN, LIKEWISE DO I--!
WAIT! THAT SUDDEN, THROBBING PAIN!
IT COMES NOT FROM WITHOUT ...BUT FROM WITHIN!
ASMODEUS!
IT'S...MY HEART! I SHOULD HAVE... KNOWN...
IT WAS WEAK... COULD NEVER STAND THE STRAIN OF TOTAL MYSTIC COMBAT!
CHANGING BACK... BACK TO ASMODEUS...!
YET, IF I MUST DIE... ONE VICTORY AT LEAST SHALL STILL BE MINE!..
AS I GIVE UTTERANCE TO THE WORDS... THERMIDORUS ...FRIGIBUS... NIHILIUS...!!
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HE COLLAPSED... ALMOST LIFELESS...
...AFTER BREATHING ONE FINAL, MURMURED INCANTATION!
FORTUNATELY, IT WAS TO NO AVAIL!
WAS IT, MY SON?
WOULD THAT YOUR WORDS HAD FOR ME THE RING OF FACT!
DR. BENTON --HE WHO WAS ONCE MY MEDICAL COLLEAGUE!!
WAIT! LET US SEE JUST WHO--
Y-YES ...YOU FOOL...
I TRIED... EVERYTHING TO STOP YOU... EVEN USING PHONE AS SIGNAL... FOR CLEA TO DESTROY YOU...
WANTED SUPREME POWER... AND CAME SO CLOSE... SO CLOSE...
THE VEIL HAS FALLEN!
YET, HE SPOKE OF ONE FINAL VICTORY...?
CANNOT THE SPELL BE REVERSED, HONORED ONE, SO THAT--
ALAS, IT MAY WELL BE THAT THE DECEIVER DIED WITH THE TRUTH AT LAST ON HIS LIPS!
THOSE WORDS WERE A SPELL HE HAD JUST FOUND ...IN THE BOOK OF THE VISHANTI!
THE SPELL OF FIRE AND ICE!!

IT WAS TOO LATE FOR MERE WORDS, MY SON... IN THE MOMENT THE SPELL WAS UTTERED!
THERE NOW REMAINS NAUGHT SAVE BATTLE... BATTLE WITH THOSE DIVINE ODIN ONCE DID IMPRISON...
YMIR, THE FROST GIANT--AND THE FIERY DEMON CALLED SURTUR!
THEN, BATTLE SHALL IT BE!
THE MONSTROUS FORCES UNLEASHED BY THE DYING WORDS OF EVIL ASMODEUS SHALL BE VANQUISHED --OR ELSE I SHALL PERISH!
SO VOWS DR. STRANGE --MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS!
NEXT: "WITH ONE BESIDE HIM!"